

## Message Text

PAGE 01 STATE 094778  
ORIGIN SS-15

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /016 R

66011  
DRAFTED BY: S/S-O SCHUMAKER  
APPROVED BY: S/S-O STEINER  
-----271948Z 016337 /40

P 271835Z APR 77  
FM SECSTATE WASHDC  
TO CINCPAC PRIORITY  
HQ AFLC WPAFB OHIO PRIORITY

S E C R E T STATE 094778

EXDIS MILITARY PLEASE HANDLE AS SPECAT

FOL TEL SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO TOKYO SEOUL MANILA ATAPEI  
FROM SINGAPORE DTD 27 APR 1977 DTG P R 270920Z APR 77 QTE

E C R E T SINGAPORE 1811

EXDIS

DEPT PLS PASS TO CINCPAC AND HQ AFLC WPAFB OHIO

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: EAIR, EIND, MILI, SN  
SUBJECT: PACIFIC PDMS SURVEY

REF: STATE 090129

SUMMARY: IN EMBASSY'S JUDGEMENT POLITICAL FACTORS  
MILITATE AGAINST THE ESTABLISHMENT IN SINGAPORE OF THE  
DEPOT LEVEL MAINTENANCE PROGRAM DESCRIBED REFTEL. EMBASSY  
BELIEVES OPERATION OF THIS SIZE AND VISIBILITY WOULD  
CREATE EXCESSIVE MILITARY PRESENCE AND COULD JEOPARDIZE  
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MORE IMPORTANT ACCESS TO SINGAPORE'S MILITARY FACILITIES  
WE CURRENTLY ENJOY AS WELL AS ADDITIONAL ACCESS WE MAY  
SEEK TO OBTAIN OVER NEXT TWO YEARS. THEREFORE, REQUEST  
SINGAPORE BE OMITTED FROM ITINERARY OF AFLC SURVEY TEAM.  
END SUMMARY.

1. IN CONSIDERING QUESTION OF ESTABLISHING DEPOT LEVEL  
MAINTENANCE PROGRAM DESCRIBED REFTEL, EMBASSY CONSIDERS  
FOLLOWING FACTORS TO BE PARTICULARLY PERTINENT:  
(A) DESPITE SINGAPORE'S MEMBERSHIP IN THE NON-ALIGNED

CLUB, THE U.S. CURRENTLY ENJOYS A REMARKABLE DEGREE OF MILITARY ACCESS TO SINGAPORE'S NAVAL AND AIR FACILITIES. UNITS OF THE SEVENTH FLEET INCLUDING AIRCRAFT CARRIERS VISIT HERE WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT LIMITATION AND OUR SAILORS CONTINUE TO RECEIVE A FRIENDLY WELCOME IN THIS CLEAN, SECURE AND HOSPITABLE ENVIRONMENT. OUR SEVENTH FLEET SHIPS ALSO HAVE ACCESS TO EXCELLENT BUNKERING AND REPAIR FACILITIES AT THE FORMER UK NAVAL BASIN AND THE SEMBAWANG SHIPYARD AT THE NORTHERN END OF THE ISLAND. THE GOS ALSO ACCORDS ALMOST AUTOMATIC CLEARANCE TO U.S. MILITARY AIRCRAFT TRANSITING SINGAPORE IN SUPPORT OF SEVENTH FLEET OPERATIONS. SEVERAL MONTHS AGO THE GOS AGREED TO ALLOW MAC FLIGHTS TO DIEGO GARCIA TO TRANSIT SINGAPORE ON AN INTERMITTENT BASIS. IT HAS ALSO ALLOWED A LIMITED NUMBER OF SEABEES FROM DIEGO GARCIA TO TAKE LEAVE IN SINGAPORE. IN ADDITION THE PRIME MINISTER HAS PERMITTED P-3 OVERFLIGHTS TO DIEGO GARCIA AND MAY BE WILLING TO ALLOW THE STAGING OF P-3 INDIAN OCEAN RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS THROUGH SINGAPORE PROVIDED THE ADMINISTRATION IS ABLE TO OBTAIN CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR SUCH A MOVE.

(B) RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN US AND SINGAPORE ARMED FORCES

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE US AND SINGAPORE ARMED FORCES HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY FRIENDLY AND COOPERATIVE. THIS HAS COME ABOUT THROUGH  
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OUR WILLINGNESS TO FACILITATE TRAINING TO THE SAF, OUR POSITIVE RESPONSE TO MODEST GOS REQUESTS FOR CASH PURCHASES OF EQUIPMENT, AND SAF PARTICIPATION IN OCCASIONAL JOINT MILITARY EXERCISES (MERLION SERIES) WHEN TASK FORCES OF THE U.S. SEVENTH FLEET TRANSIT THE REGION. THIS RELATIONSHIP WILL MOVE ONE STEP CLOSER IN JULY WITH THE ARRIVAL OF A FIVE-MAN USAF MILITARY TRAINING ASSISTANCE TEAM (MTAT) WHICH IS BEING PROVIDED BY THE U.S. AIR FORCE UNDER A TWO-YEAR CONTRACT TO TRAIN RSAF STAFF IN MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES. IN BUILDING THIS RELATIONSHIP THE U.S. AND GOS HAVE CAREFULLY REFRAINED FROM ANY ACTIONS WHICH WOULD UNDERMINE THE IMAGE WHICH THE GOS SEEKS TO PROJECT OF A NON-ALIGNED GOVERNMENT PURSUING AN INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY. THE GOS HAS PAID IN FULL FOR ALL THE EQUIPMENT IT BUYS AND HAS NOT SOUGHT (AND WE HAVE NOT PUSHED) THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PERMANENTLY ASSIGNED MILITARY ADVISORS.

(C) OUR SUCCESS IN DEVELOPING SUCH EXCELLENT ACCESS TO SINGAPORE'S MILITARY FACILITIES AND IN BUILDING THE COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE RSAF DESCRIBED ABOVE CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO MANY FACTORS, MOST NOTABLY THE PRIME MINISTER'S DESIRE TO KEEP THE US SEVENTH FLEET OPERATING IN THE REGION TO BALANCE SOVIET NAVAL POWER. HOWEVER, ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT FACTORS HAS BEEN OUR

SUCCESSFUL EFFORT TO MAINTAIN A LOW MILITARY PROFILE.  
THE U.S. HAS ONLY SOUGHT ACCESS TO FACILITIES ON A  
PERMISSIVE BASIS AND HAS REFRAINED FROM SEEKING ACCESS  
RIGHTS, OR THE OWNERSHIP OF THE FACILITIES THEMSELVES.  
WE HAVE GENERALLY SENT SINGAPOREANS TO THE U.S. FOR  
TRAINING RATHER THAN BRINGING U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL  
TO SINGAPORE. (THE MTAT IS THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT EXCEPTION  
TO THIS POLICY). WE HAVE ALSO KEPT A TIGHT REIN ON THE  
NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL ASSIGNED TO SINGAPORE. CON-  
SEQUENTLY, OUR TRAINING ACTIVITIES AND EXTENSIVE FMS SALES  
HAVE ALL BEEN HANDLED BY OUR TEN-MAN DAO OFFICE, AND  
THE COMPLEX REQUIREMENTS FOR BUNKERING AND REPAIR OF U.S.  
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SHIPS HAVE BEEN MANAGED BY THE SMALL THIRTEEN-MAN U.S.  
NAVY OFFICE.

(D) THE HIGHLY USEFUL ACCESS WE ENJOY AND THE CURRENT  
COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OUR ARMED FORCES COULD  
BE JEOPARDIZED OVER TIME IF WE PERMITTED THE ESTABLISHMENT  
OF THE PROGRAM DESCRIBED IN REFTEL. TO ASSIGN 35 MILITARY  
AND 35 U.S. CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES TO SINGAPORE WOULD MEAN MORE  
THAN DOUBLING THE TOTAL NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL CURRENTLY  
ASSIGNED HERE AND ALMOYT DOUBLING THE TOTAL U.S. OFFICIAL  
PRESENCE IN SINGAPORE. PERFORMING MAINTENANCE, OVERHAUL  
AND POSSIBLE MODIFICATIONS ON 170 AIRCRAFT A YEAR COULD  
INVOLVE THE PRESENCE OF AS MANY AS 30 OR 40 U.S. MILITARY  
AIRCRAFT IN SINGAPORE AT ANY ONE TIME INCLUDING F-4  
FIGHTER AIRCRAFT. PRESUMABLY THESE PLANES WOULD HAVE TO  
BE FLIGHT TESTED AFTER OVERHAUL WHICH WOULD INCREASE  
THEIR VISIBILITY. THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS WOULD, OF  
COURSE, BECOME AWARE OF THIS OPERATION AND MIGHT PRODUCE  
SPECULATIVE ARTICLES ATTEMPTING TO CONNECT THE MTAT, SUPPORT  
FLIGHTS TO DIEGO GARCIA, P-3 FLIGHTS (IF THESE ARE APPROVED  
DURING THE NEXT YEAR) AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PDM  
OPERATION AS EVIDENCE THAT THE U.S. IS DEVELOPING A  
SPECIAL MILITARY RELATIONSHIP WITH SINGAPORE INVOLVING  
A LARGE COMPLEX OF OPERATIONS.

(E) THERE IS ALSO A REAL POSSIBILITY THAT THE ESTABLISH-  
MENT OF A PDM OPERATION IN SINGAPORE RISKS BEING MISINTERPRETED  
BY FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS. SINCE THE FALL OF VIETNAM THE U.S. HAS  
WITHDRAWN FORCES FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PDM  
OPERATION FOLLOWING THE INCREASED USE OF SINGAPORE FACILITIES  
BY U.S. FORCES FOR OTHER PURPOSES (SEE PARA 1A ABOVE) COULD MISLEAD  
A NUMBER OF GOVERNMENTS AS TO THE NATURE OF THE FUTURE U.S.  
MILITARY ROLE IN SINGAPORE AND SOUTHEAST ASIA. THIS MIGHT GENERATE  
NEGATIVE REACTIONS FROM SINGAPORE'S NEAR NEIGHBORS, ESPECIALLY-  
MALAYSIA) WHICH MIGHT QUESTION WHETHER THIS NEW INFUSION OF U.S.  
MILITARY ACTIVITY IN THE REGION WOULD BE CONTRARY TO THE ASEAN  
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ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY UNDER WHICH THE ASEAN GOVERNMENTS HAVE AGREED IN PRINCIPLE THAT ALL FOREIGN MILITARY FORCES SHOULD EVENTUALLY BE WITHDRAWN. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT SIGNIFICANT PRESS SPECULATION AND/OR CONCERNS EXPRESSED BY NEIGHBORING GOVERNMENTS COULD CAUSE THE GOS TO RECONSIDER THE EXTENT TO WHICH IT IS WILLING TO COOPERATE IN SATISFYING OUR MILITARY REQUIRE

MENTS. IF THE GOS DECIDED TO CHANGE DIRECTION IT MIGHT LEAVE A PDM OPERATION IN PLACE FOR COMMERCIAL REASONS, BUT REDUCE COOPERATION IN AREAS OF GREATER STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE TO US.

(F) GOS ITSELF WOULD PROBABLY HAVE AMBIVALENT FEELINGS ABOUT THIS PROJECT. MINDEF AND EDB HAVE ALWAYS BEEN INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING AN AEROSPACE INDUSTRY IN SINGAPORE AND WOULD PROBABLY SEE THIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP A SKILLED WORKFORCE WHICH COULD SUSTAIN SUCH AN INDUSTRY. THE SINGAPORE AEROSPACE MAINTENANCE COMPANY (SAMCO) AND LOCKHEED AIR SERVICES SINGAPORE (LASS), WHICH CURRENTLY HAVE THE CONTRACTS FOR RSAF MAINTENANCE, OVERHAUL AND AIRCRAFT MODIFICATION, BOTH HAVE CONSIDERABLE UNUSED CAPACITY AND WOULD WELCOME THE OPPORTUNITY FOR FRESH BUSINESS. HOWEVER, MFA AND PERHAPS SOME OTHER ELEMENTS IN THE GOVERNMENT WOULD PROBABLY ARGUE THAT THE INTRODUCTION OF SUCH A LARGE NUMBER OF U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL AND AIRCRAFT WOULD JEOPARDIZE SINGAPORE'S NON-ALIGNED IMAGE AND WOULD PROVIDE A POTENTIAL TARGET FOR DOMESTIC OPPOSITION. IN WEIGHING THE PROS AND CONS THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD HAVE TO CONSIDER THE SOVIET REACTION. THE GOS HAS REPEATEDLY REBUFFED SOVIET EFFORTS TO ACQUIRE AN OIL STORAGE FACILITY IN SINGAPORE. IF THE GOS PERMITS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A LARGE PDM OPERATION THE SOVIETS WOULD HAVE AN ADDED EXCUSE TO PREASSURE THE GOS TOBBE EQUALLY ACCOMMODATING TO SOVIET REQUESTS.

(G) IF THE GOS DID DECIDE TO ACCEDE TO A U.S. REQUEST FOR A DEPOT LEVEL MAINTENANCE FACILITY, IT WOULD BE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE GOVERNMENT TO EXPECT SOME KIND OF QUID PRO QUO FOR ITS COOPERATION. THIS COULD TAKE THE FORM OF A REQUEST TO PURCHASE CERTAIN MILITARY EQUIPMENT AT CONCESSIONAL PRICES, SUCH AS THE PENDING REQUEST FOR TWO C-130S.

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2. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT IT IS POSSIBLE THAT IF THE U.S. WERE TO MAKE A STRONG DEMARCHE REQUESTING GOS CONSENT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A DEPOT LEVEL MAINTENANCE FACILITY, THE GOS MIGHT EVENTUALLY AGREE TO IT. HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE IT IS NOT IN OUR INTEREST TO DO SO. EVEN THOUGH THE GOS IS POLITICALLY STABLE AND HAS NO PROBLEM WITH A DOMESTIC OPPOSITION TODAY THIS MAY NOT BE THE CASE A FEW YEARS FROM NOW. WE DO NOT THINK IT IS WISE TO INTRODUCE OPERATIONS HERE WHICH WOULD RAISE THE U.S. MILITARY PROFILE

SIGNIFICANTLY IF SUCH OPERATIONS CAN BE PERFORMED ELSEWHERE.  
WE SEE NO REASON EXPOSE THE GOS NEEDLESSLY TO EITHER EXTERNAL  
OR INTERNAL PRESSURES WHICH MIGHT JEOPARDIZE THE HIGHLY FAVORABLE  
SITUATION WHICH CURRENTLY PREVAILS WITH RESPECT TO OUR OTHER  
MILITARY INTERESTS IN SINGAPORE. THEREFORE, UNLESS RESPONSES  
TO REFTEL FROM OTHER POSTS INDICATE THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY  
OF ESTABLISHING THIS OPERATION ELSEWHERE IN EAST ASIA, RECOMMEND  
SINGAPORE NOT BE INCLUDED IN THE ITINERARY OF THE AFLC SURVEY TEAM.

3. COUNTRY TEAM CONCURS.  
GRAM UNQTE VANCE

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## Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
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**Decaption Note:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 22 May 2009  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
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**Disposition Remarks:**  
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**Document Source:** ADS  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** S/S-O SCHUMAKER  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
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**Retention:** 0  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 27-Oct-2004 12:00:00 am  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**SAS ID:** 2669251  
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**Review Markings:**  
Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
22 May 2009  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009